

NOWBC Co-op Purchasing Policies

Metro Vancouver has access to a global food supply. It is not easy to determine the most responsible food purchasing choice when faced with the complexity of the modern food system. To help make purchasing decisions NOWBC co-op has prioritized the issues that we believe are most influential in creating a sustainable food system. When faced with new purchasing decisions we ask “will purchasing this item contribute to NOWBC’s guiding principles?”

Guiding principles for purchasing decisions

Foods and other products sourced by NOWBC should:

- Support and promote a strong local economy
- Support and promote sustainable, health promoting farming practices
- Support and promote local food processors that have a commitment to nutrition and minimizing their ecological footprint.
- Support and promote growers and producers who have a commitment to social responsibility
- Minimize waste by favouring minimal packaging, re-use and recycling of materials.

NOWBC’s Purchasing Priorities:

Fresh vegetables and fruit; nuts, grains and legumes

1. **Buy from local certified organic farms.** We define local as the lower mainland and lower Fraser Valley.
2. **Buy from local non-certified organic farms.** These are growers who adhere to organic management practices and who have not certified because they sell to people who know and trust them.
3. **Buy from the organic producers who are closest to Metro Vancouver** when local organic is not available.
4. **Minimize the amount of food we import in the off-season¹.** Offer as much local organic variety as possible during the off season by purchasing; storage crops such as root crops and winter squash; frost-tolerant greens; tree fruit; and local organic frozen berries throughout the winter.

Processed foods

1. **Buy from local certified organic processors, using local certified organic ingredients.** We are always encouraging small scale processors to offer products with as much local organic content as possible.
2. **Buy from local non-certified organic processors, using local organic ingredients.**

¹NOWBC will offer a small, rotating mix of imported organic fruit and fresh greens during the off-season for our customers who prefer more produce choice than is locally available at that time of year. For example, we find there is strong demand for broccoli throughout the year. This is a crop that is difficult to grow in BC. We hope to encourage local growers to develop acclimatized varieties of broccoli and other hardy vegetables, and to extend the season by holding plantings under cover (e.g.: poly tunnels) to prevent frost damage.

3. **Buy from local processors using local ingredients.** An example is honey where it is difficult to achieve organic certification.
4. **Buy from local organic processors, using non-local organic ingredients.** An example is with our organic peanut butter that is processed locally using imported organic peanuts
5. **Buy from Fair Trade organic producers of imported foods.** Some processed foods (such as coffee, tea, chocolate and sugar) are made from crops that do not grow in our climate. These foods are so popular in our culture that we have decided to offer fair-trade organic options for the most popular items in this category. In each case we look for products which are minimally processed and produced as close to Metro Vancouver as possible.

Other Purchasing Considerations

- Where possible, we purchase from producers whom we know and of whose practices and commitment to sustainability and social responsibility we have good knowledge. These are growers who have a strong commitment to sustainability in every sense of the word: respect for the land, respect for the creatures who inhabit the land, and respect for the people who live and work in their community. We encourage our farming partners to extend their season by committing to purchase from them for as long into the winter and spring as they have product available.
- Transportation practices and the resultant carbon footprint is a significant consideration for us. For example, if one supplier is trucking fruit from Central America, and another is shipping by sea, we will give preference to the latter. The fuel consumed by ocean freighter per 40 ft container from the Pacific coast of Mexico to Vancouver is about one third or less of that for a highway transport truck pulling the same.
- We avoid purchasing from countries with questionable food safety standards.
- We are keeping abreast of the evolution of complementary standards such as Fair Trade and SPCA Ethical. Sometimes these standards have considerable redundancy with organic standards, and sometimes they provide real benefit. We are currently purchasing from a number of farms which carry The Land Conservancy's "Conservation Partners" certification, which indicates that the farm is protecting wildlife habitat. See www.conservancy.bc.ca/content.asp?sectionack=cpp

Non-Food Items

While our focus is on food, the co-op also sources non-food household items such as cleaners and toilet paper. In line with our goals of minimizing our ecological footprint and working towards sustainability, we buy from companies who are doing the same, and we will only stock non-toxic, environmentally friendly products that have not been tested on animals. We will give preference to local producers as well as products that reduce packaging waste, are biodegradable, and do not contain harmful additives.

This policy is a living document. We are always open to your ideas and knowledge to make it better.

NOWBC Co-op Management